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10 Shots at Tony Blauer

Tony Blauer of CrossFit Defense answers 10 questions about his new self-defense seminar. Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

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All images: Courtesy of Tony Blauer

Tony Blauer is to personal safety and self-defense what Greg Glassman is to health and fitness. And not just because Blauer is the brains behind the newest specialty course to hit the CrossFit community: CrossFit Defense.

The similarities between 56-year-old Glassman and 52-year-old Blauer go much deeper than that.

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Blauer, whose foundation was wrestling, martial arts and boxing, has been working with law enforcement and the military for years and was speaking Glassman's language long before he knew what CrossFit was all about, long before Blauer even knew who Glassman was. The two were evolving in parallel and didn't even know it.

“All fights are dangerous, but the most dangerous of all is the ambush. You can't have a favorite move. You can't be a specialist.”

—Tony Blauer

“Coach Glassman was teaching functional movements while I was teaching functional movement for fighting. While CrossFit used terms like, ‘Be prepared for the unknown and unknowable,’ I always said, ‘All fights are dangerous, but the most dangerous of all is the ambush.’ You don't know when or where your next fight will take place. You can't have a favorite move. You can't be a specialist. Your best move might trigger my best counter,” Blauer said.

Also like CrossFit, Blauer believes what he teaches is universally applicable and scalable.

“I always say that we need a system that isn't gender-, age- or task-specific. We need a system that's generic in its applicability to humans,” he said.

It was only a matter of time until Blauer and Glassman found each other.

“People in my (law-enforcement and military) community kept asking me if I had heard of Greg Glassman. They would always say to me, ‘You guys sound alike philosophically,’” Blauer said.

So he looked into CrossFit and its founder.

“When I heard Coach Glassman speak in 2006, I was mesmerized. Here was a fitness program with a philosophy,” Blauer said. “We had been talking this way for a long time, although our language wasn't as refined as

the CrossFit language. But that was my thing: creating a generic self-defense system that would help change the face of violence.”

So Blauer decided to reach out to Glassman.

“Greg called me and the connection was immediate,” said Blauer, who then flew to Santa Cruz to meet the man he had heard so much about.

After doing a Level 1 CrossFit Seminar in California, Blauer was immediately on board the CrossFit train, not just with Glassman but with the entire CrossFit community.

Blauer explained what hooked him on CrossFit was the community, how the person who finished last got the biggest applause. This was something he hadn't seen before.

“The martial-art communities are like religions—polarized, judgmental—where the style is more important than the athlete. In CrossFit, it's about the person. I love that. Anywhere I go within the CrossFit community, I am welcomed,” Blauer said.

Six years since meeting Glassman in Santa Cruz, Blauer is now totally immersed in the CrossFit community, evidenced by the introduction of the newest specialty course: [CrossFit Defense](#).



Like CrossFit, self-defense is about preparing yourself physically and mentally for the unexpected.

What follows are Tony Blauer's answers to 10 questions about his new seminar.

1. Who should attend?

I joke and say this course is for anyone who doesn't live in a bubble. Really, it is true. Every day, we find ourselves in potentially dangerous situations. We know this, but we try to bury our heads in the sand.

“Elite fitness doesn't guarantee your safety. So what if you're in the best shape of your life and you have no idea how to protect yourself?”

—Tony Blauer

As CrossFitters, we try to prepare ourselves for anything. We tell athletes that bar muscle-ups are functional—like if you are ever hanging from a bridge and need to get back up to save your life. Heavy deadlifts are important—what if a big piece of furniture falls on a child? But the truth is violence is much more likely to happen than tumbling off a bridge.



It was only natural for Blauer to connect with Coach Glassman and Nicole Carroll and Dave Castro of CrossFit Training.

Elite fitness doesn't guarantee your safety. So what if you're in the best shape of your life if you have no idea how to protect yourself?

2. I've never been in a fight, and the thought of even doing this course scares me. Why should I go?

Think of it like taking a CPR course. You don't learn CPR hoping that someone chokes in a restaurant. You don't say, "I'm not learning CPR until people start choking more often so I can do the Heimlich."

Fights are scary, even for the inoculated professional. When that first real fight happens, certain things are going to happen to your mind and body. You don't want the first experience with those things to be in the clutches of some sweaty creeper on a street corner.

3. How much can I actually learn in a one-day course?

You can learn a lot. If I had one day to teach everything I could to my kid or my best friend who is going away backpacking alone in Europe, this course would be like pre-deployment training.

“This is street awareness.”

– Tony Blauer

This is a self-defense, not a martial-arts course. World-champion boxers train for years before winning their first title. Black belts are earned after a decade of mastery. Those are sport-based applications, with rules, where options are limited by those rules.

Self-defense, on the other hand, doesn't follow any rules. You don't need a ton of training to pick up a brick and hit someone in the face. What you do need is the indignation and will to protect yourself.

In one day, people will learn that they are a human weapon with the ability and wherewithal to protect their family. And we show them how to turn it on, and people are amazed how strong and fast they are in just one day.

4. What exactly is “functional self-defense?”

Your body has these primal survival instincts. If you’ve got a premonition that something isn’t right, you should address the issue. You’re better off to address the issue and find out that you misread something than to find out the premonition was right. Every victim of violence always says, “I knew something was wrong before it happened.” But they go into denial because they don’t know how to manage the fear thoughts.

We’re not teaching people just to kick and punch. We’re teaching them moral, ethical and legal prescriptions to handle interpersonal violence. This is street awareness.

5. How does CrossFit fit into self-defense?

We’ve looked at movements within the CrossFit repertoire, and a lot of these movements—push-ups, wall ball, knees-to-elbows, ball slams, and movements that test to see how fast can you open and close your hips—parallel and mimic a knee, an elbow, a palm strike or a forearm blast to push away danger. They’re all core-to-extremity movements.

As example: You’ve done thousands of push-ups during your life. Each push-up is pretty much the same movement as a palm strike. So we just need to teach you how to flip that “switch” to get aggressive and to protect yourself.

We use CrossFit movements to support the physical drills. Our system is designed to get the athlete to think aggressively and combatively by putting context and scenario in play. Instead of running 400 meters thinking about Pose technique, we get someone to chase you down and tag you. People discover they have more speed when the goal is to not get caught. We teach people how to infuse an emotional perspective into their training.

There’s also a fear-management parallel with CrossFit. When you look at the WOD on the whiteboard and think, “How am I going to get through this?” you manage the fear and you start internally coaching yourself. These are some of the exact same emotional and psychological responses at the beginning of any confrontation.

CrossFit Defense uses much of what is learned inside the box to teach the community how to think about safety outside the box.

6. Do I need to prepare or practice to attend?

No prerequisites needed, except a desire to be safer and a more complete athlete/person. There are videos available online and in the preload email that you get when you register. Watching them and getting a basic understanding of **SPEAR (Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response) System** principles will enhance and improve your experience.



Movements you’ve practiced again and again in CrossFit, like push-ups, wall balls and knees-to-elbows, translate into basic self-defense maneuvers.

7. Will I really remember what I learn?

The cool thing about the SPEAR System is that you already know how to do a lot of it. It is not technique but large gross motor movements that most people are quick to pick up and are easy to recall. We teach principles not techniques. In most cases, it is what your body wants to do. We are just adding some elements to make you more effective.

Games competitor Blair Morrison said of the program, "It was a lot easier than I thought it would be. It's natural. Your body already knows how to do it. That is comforting right off the bat."

8. Will we learn drills to take back to our box or garage gym?

We will do drills and skills that could be brought back and worked into the programming as a warm-up, skill session or a WOD. More importantly, we will work on some fear-management skills that can be taken back and implemented into any part of your life (especially during tough WODs). There will also be combative-based WODs.



Blauer and Castro "discuss" self-defense techniques at the CrossFit Games.

9. Do we "fight" at the course?

We don't spar. We will do drills that replicate real-life scenarios. Like CrossFit, all the drills are scalable to any level and include points of safety to make sure we all go home uninjured.

Self-defense is a contact sport, so we will have some aggressive training to prepare for the unknown and unknowable, but there is no sparring or fighting in the conventional sense.

10. I'd like to teach this at my box. Is this a certificate course?

This one-day course is not a certification course. There are plans for a two-day (seminar), or you could also attend our [PDR \(Personal Defense Readiness\)](#) course.



About the Author

*Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts **WOD HOG**, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the 2012 Canada West Regional.*